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# Briefing Book: National Endowment for the Arts (1994): Speech 39

Claiborne Pell

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STATEMENT OF SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL REGARDING ELIMINATION  
OF GRANTS TO INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS

Mr. President, I rise in opposition to the suggestion that we eliminate the National Endowment's ability to provide grants to individual artists. Providing support for struggling talent and enabling artists to devote themselves to the creation of literature, music, dance and other disciplines was one of the core aspirations motivating the foundation of an Arts Endowment. Ideally, a national endowment quietly fosters the creative spirit, providing temporary livelihood for artists without other means of income, and therefore allowing the production of significant work, then equally quietly departing the scene when the works become successful.

Judged by these criteria, the Endowment's grants to individual artists have been a success. Artists who have received fellowships from the National Endowment have gone on to win myriad awards, including 46 Pulitzer Prizes, 48 Macarthur "genius" awards, 28 National Book awards, 11 Obie awards, dozens of Guggenheim fellowships and many other distinctions. These artists include Wynton Marsalis, Alice Walker, Tony Kushner and Wendy Wasserstein.

Pursuant to the 1990 amendments of the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act in 1990, the NEA made major reforms in the peer review panel procedures governing the review of grant applications from individuals and organizations. Artists applying for these fellowships undergo a rigorous process of competition. All applications are reviewed first by a diverse panel of experts, and second by the Senate-confirmed 26 member panel and lastly by the Chairperson of the Endowment.

The long-term effect of these fellowships can be extensive. For example, Ms. Bobbie Ann Mason received an NEA fellowship allowing her to devote herself to writing her novel "In Country", about one Kentucky family's coping with the return of a Vietnam veteran. The novel was made into a successful movie which proved a significant economic boost for Mayfield and Paducah, Kentucky. The movie in turn led thousands of people to the Paducah mall to purchase copies of the book.

Mr. President, support of individual artists is central to the mission of the NEA -- essentially to provide a fertile environment for creative talent in our nation. I urge my colleagues not to restrain the Arts Endowment from supporting this most effective means of supporting the continued development of creativity and culture in our society.

## **TALKING POINTS RE: INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS**

- o Artists who have received fellowships from the National Endowment have won myriad awards, including 46 Pulitzer Prizes, 48 Macarthur "genius" awards, 28 National Book awards, 11 Obie awards, dozens of Guggenheim fellowships and many other distinctions. These artists include Alvin Ailey, Twyla Tharp, Wynton Marsalis, Alice Walker and Wendy Wasserstein.

- o Individual artists and museum professionals are as central to the arts as the scholar is to the humanities and the scientist to science. Support of individual artists is central to the mission of the NEA -- essentially to provide a fertile environment for creative talent in our nation. This support fosters nascent creative artists who have not yet developed the commercial success needed to sustain a career in the arts as well as supporting established artists embark on particularly exciting and imaginative projects. These projects parallel the support to individuals granted by National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Health. Through the work of these individuals the cutting edge of art, science, literature and medicine are maintained in the United States.

- o Fellowships provide artists the opportunity to study, to research and create works. Most artists cannot make enough money to support themselves while they create, NEA fellowships allow the artists to shake free for a short time of the struggle to survive and simply concentrate and create in their field.

o Pursuant to the 1990 amendments of the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act in 1990, the NEA made major reforms in the peer review panel procedures governing the review of grant applications from individuals and organizations. Artists applying for these fellowships undergo a rigorous process of review. Competition is intense. All applications are reviewed first by a geographically and ethnically diverse panel of experts, second by the Presidentially appointed, Senate-confirmed 26 member panel and lastly by the Chairperson of the Endowment.

o The effect of these fellowships can be unending. Bobbie Ann Mason received an NEA fellowship which allowed her to devote the time to write her novel "In Country", about one Kentucky family's coping with the return of a Vietnam veteran. The novel was made into a successful movie which proved a significant economic boost for Mayfield and Paducah, Kentucky. The movie then led thousands of people to the Paducah mall to purchase copies of the book.